

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 10267 231458Z

44

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 10267

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TAGS: PFOR, IN, UR

SUBJ: SOVIET VIEWS OF INDIA

1. SUMMARY. POLITICAL COUNSELOR CALLED ON V.P. STEPANOV, DEPUTY CHIEF OF THE SOVIET MFA'S SOUTH ASIAN DIVISION, JULY 18. DURING THE CALL STEPANOV COMMENTED THAT THE PRESENT POLITICAL CRISIS IN INDIA WAS "VERY SERIOUS." THE EMERGENCY HAD BEEN "FORCED" ON PRIME MINISTER GANDHI BY "RIGHTIST" CALLS FOR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, HE SAID. BUT IT WAS ENTIRELY AN INTERNAL MATTER AND HAD NO EFFECT ON INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICIES OR RELATIONS WITH THE USSR. THERE WERE "NO CLOUDS" IN SOVIET-INDIAN RELATIONS, HE SAID. U.S. MEDIA SEEMED SHARPLY CRITICAL OF MR. GANDHI ALMOST TO THE POINT OF PERSONAL VENDETTA, BUT INDIA'S NEIGHBORS, ESPECIALLY PAKISTAN, SEEMED TO FEEL THAT A STRONG INDIA UNDER KNOWN LEADERSHIP WAS REFERABLE TO ANY LIKELY ALTERNATIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. POLITICAL COUNSELOR CALLED ON VALENTIN PAVLOVICH STEPANOV, DEPUTY CHIEF OF THE SOVIET MFA'S SOUTH ASIAN DIVISION, AND LEONID RAINA, INDIA DESK OFFICER, ON JULY 17 TO DISCUSS RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIA.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 10267 231458Z

STEPANOV, FORMER SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO SRI LANKA, BEGAN

BY SAYING THAT THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS WAS "VERY SERIOUS," THE MOST SERIOUS IN INDIA'S POST-INDEPENDENCE HISTORY. THE SITUATION IN JUNE, SAID STEPANOV, HAD "FORCED" MRS. GANDHI TO ACT. THE RIGHTISTS IN PARTICULAR WERE SEEKING TO DISRUPT DOMESTIC ORDER. THEY ANNOUNCED PLANS TO HOLD NATIONWIDE STRIKES AND CALLED FOR THE MILITARY AND CIVIL SERVICE TO DISOBEY GOVERNMENT ORDERS. THIS WAS A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY AND ONE WHICH NO GOVERNMENT COULD WILLINGLY TOLERATE. THE LOYALTY AND DISCIPLINE OF THE MILITARY IN PARTICULAR WERE VITAL TO PUBLIC ORDER AND STABILITY IN INDIA AS IN MANY OTHER LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, SAID STEPANOV. THE SOVIETS, HE SAID, HAD BEEN SOMEWHAT SURPRISED BY THE LACK OF PUBLIC REACTION AGAINST THE PRIME MINISTER'S EMERGENCY MEASURES. THIS SEEMED TO SHOW, SAID STEPANOV, THAT THE "RIGHTISTS" AND SO-CALLED "REFORMERS" LIKE NARAYAN DID NOT HAVE THE MASS FOLLOWING WHICH THEY HAD CLAIMED. THE ARREST OF A HANDFUL OF AGITATORS HAD APPARENTLY SILENCED THE ENTIRE MOVEMENT AGAINST MRS. GANDHI.

3. IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW EVENTS WILL DEVELOP, SAID STEPANOV, AND HE DID NOT COMMENT ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF A RELAXATION OF THE EMERGENCY MEASURES NOR OF THE CHANCES FOR HOLDING THE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR NEXT FEBRUARY. HE NOTED THAT MRS. GANDHI HAD ACTED ACCORDING TO PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION. MOSCOW HOPES THAT THE PRESENT DIFFICULTIES WILL BE IRONED OUT, HE SAID. THE PROBLEM, IN ANY CASE, WAS AN INTERNAL ONE, HE STRESSED, AND HAD ITS OWN CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES. OUTSIDE COUNTRIES MUST REGRAIN FROM ANY FORM OF INTERFERENCE, HE ASSERTED.

4. THE SOVIETS HAVE NOTED THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS NOT COMMENTED ON THE DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIA BUT THAT THE U.S. PRESS HAS NOT BEEN FRIENDLY. RAINA SUGGESTED THAT THIS PERHAPS DEMONSTRATED A TYPE OF "VENDETTA" BY THE U.S. PRESS, PERHAPS AS A RESULT OF EARLIER INDIAN PRESS CRITICISM OF THE U.S.

5. POLITICAL COUNSELOR POINTED TO THE ABSENCE OF
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 10267 231458Z

OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT COMMENTARY IN NOTING THAT WE, TOO, CONSIDERED THESE DEVELOPMENTS TO BE INDIA'S INTERNAL AFFAIR. HE ALSO DISCOUNTED THE NOTION OF A "VENDETTA" IN THE U.S. PRESS. HE DID POINT OUT, HOWEVER, THAT THE U.S. PRESS ATTITUDE PERHAPS REFLECTS SOME DISAPPOINTMENT ABOUT INDIA'S APPARENT TURN AWAY FROM DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS.

6. RAINA NOTED THAT U.S. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMENTS ABOUT RELATIONS WITH INDIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE HAVE USUALLY BEGUN WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT COMMON PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY--"THE WORLD'S LARGEST AND THE WORLD'S STRONGEST DEMOCRACIES"--AS THE BASIS FOR MUTUAL RELATIONS. HE WONDERED WHAT THE U.S. ATTITUDE WOULD BE IF AMERICANS DECIDE THAT INDIA NO LONGER FOLLOWS DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES.

7. COMMENTING ON THE PRIME MINISTER'S ECONOMIC MEASURES, STEPANOV SAID THAT THOSE WHICH HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED THUS FAR WERE ONLY THE BEGINNING AND SOME WERE IN FACT NOT NEW. THE QUESTION WAS WHETHER THEY COULD BE MADE TO WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY IN THE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES. THESE MEASURES WOULD ULTIMATELY DETERMINE THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF MRS. GANDHI'S RECENT ACTIONS, HE SAID.

8. ON SOVIET-INDIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS, STEPANOV SAID THAT NOTHING HAD CHANGED AND THAT THEY WERE VERY CLOSE, JUST AS BEFORE. THERE IS "NOT A CLOUD IN THE SKY," HE SAID. TO A QUESTION ABOUT THE RUPEE-RUBLE EXCHANGE QUESTION, RAINA SAID THAYSIT APPLIES ONLY TO TRIVIAL SUMS OF MONEY SUCH AS THE AMOUNTS SPENT BY TOURISTS. IT DOES NOT AFFECT BILATERAL TRADE OR DEBT ACCOUNTS, HE SAID, SO IT IS A MINOR MATTER. RAINA ALSO SAID THAT THE QUESTION OF ADDITIONAL SOVIET AID HAD NOT COME UP. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PROJECTS ALREADY UNDERWAY WHICH ARE BEING CARRIED ON AS BEFORE, HE SAID.

9. ON RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND THE OTHER COUNTRIES OF SOUTH ASIA, STEPANOV SAID THAT PAKISTAN WAS NATURALLY CONCERNED ABOUT ANY CHANGE IN INDIA, BUT THE PAKISTANIS HAD APPARENTLY JUDGED THE PRESENT SITUATION SOBERLY AND WERE NOT SEEKING TO RAISE PROBLEMS. ON THE CONTRARY, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 MOSCOW 10267 231458Z

SAID STEPANOV, BHUTTO AND THE OTHER PAKISTANI LEADERS PRESUMABLY FELT THAT THE COOPERATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN WITH THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AND MRS. GANDHI MADE IT PREFERABLE TO CONTINUE DEALING WITH HER. THE PRIME MINISTER'S DOMESTIC OPPONENTS, STEPANOV POINTED OUT IN THIS REGARD, ARE ALL HAWKS WHEN IT COMES TO RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN. THE SIMLA PROCESS WAS WORKING SATISFACTORILY, SAID STEPANOV, AND RELATIONS IN THE AREA SHOULD CONTINUE TO IMPROVE.

10. STEPANOV AND RAINA WELCOMED CONTACTS WITH U.S. EMBASSY AND SAID THAT THEY LOOKED FORWARD TO FURTHER EXCHANGES. STEPANOV IS IN HIS MID-50'S, ABOUT 5'8" TALL, WIRY BUILD AND VERY ALERT. HIS LAST OVERSEAS POSTING HAD BEEN TO SRI LANKA, WHERE HE HAD BEEN AMBASSADOR FROM 1968-70.

HE HAD EARLIER SERVED AS COUNSELOR IN COLOMBO AND WAS STATIONED IN NEW DELHI 1950-55. HE SPEAKS GOOD ENGLISH AND MENTIONED KNOWING U.S. OFFICIALS DURING HIS TOURS IN SOUTH ASIA. RAINA IS ABOUT 35 YEARS OLD, 6'4", AND AT LEAST 250 LBS. HE SAID THAT HIS MOST RECENT POSTING ABROAD HAD BEEN TO DELHI, 1968-72, AND THAT HE IS NOW THE INDIAN DESK OFFICER. HE SPEAKS ALMOST PERFECT AMERICAN ENGLISH, IS FRIENDLY AND OUTGOING, AND IS QUITE IMPRESSIVE--HE IS UNUSUALLY YOUNG TO HOLD SUCH A RELATIVELY IMPORTANT POST IN MFA.
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